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LETIZIA TAGLIAFIERRO
INSPECTOR GENERAL

November 19, 2020

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017

Re: NYS IG 3025-172-2019

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez:

On October 15, 2019, The City University of New York (CUNY) referred to the Office of the New York State Inspector General a complaint from a plumbers union representative alleging irregularities in a plumbing course offered by Hostos Community College (Hostos). The complaint alleged, among other concerns, that the course description included misleading information about qualifications students would receive upon successful completion; that [REDACTED] a plumber employed by Hostos who taught the course, lacked required training credentials; and that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] a privately employed plumber who also taught the course, improperly received direct payments from students enrolled in the course.

The course in question, the 16-Hour Limited Gas Work Qualification, was offered by Hostos's Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development in four evening sessions at an off-campus site from August to October 2019. (CUNY advised that a fourth session scheduled for December 2019 was canceled as a result of the

complaint.) The course was approved by the New York City Department of Buildings, which issues master plumbing licenses, and was listed in Hostos's course offerings.

The Inspector General's investigation found that notices for the course posted by [REDACTED] online misrepresented the value of the course. The notices stated: "This course is a Department of Buildings requirement in order to obtain a Department of Buildings, Journeyman Plumber with Full Gas Work Qualification card and a Limited Gas Work Qualification card." This statement is false. The course was intended to train "helpers" to assist journeymen, and its successful completion only allowed students to apply for a "limited" gas card. Additionally, at least two course notices posted online by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] included no branding or other information identifying Hostos as the sponsoring educational institution, potentially creating the misimpression that the course was solely an offering by [REDACTED] private business. [REDACTED], the Hostos Interim Dean of the Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development, advised the Inspector General that he had no knowledge of the notices and had not seen them until they were shown to him during the course of this investigation.

The Inspector General's investigation determined that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both licensed master plumbers, were instructors for the course. Hostos advised the Inspector General that it had deemed both individuals qualified trainers, and that their selection was approved by the New York City Department of Buildings.

The Inspector General further found that students taking the class paid the course fees directly to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] not Hostos. [REDACTED] advised the Inspector General that although this payment arrangement was improper, Hostos was not owed money as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] paid course expenses from the fees they received. The only expense incurred by Hostos was the cost of issuing certificates to students who successfully completed the course, for which [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] reimbursed Hostos. [REDACTED] stated that Hostos subsequently established procedures to ensure that all student fees are remitted directly to Hostos.

In view of these findings, I recommend that CUNY and Hostos Community College implement written procedures ensuring that the educational institutions, not course trainers, exercise responsibility for producing and reviewing course notices. I also recommend that CUNY and Hostos establish an internal audit mechanism to ensure that newly created procedures for course fee payments are followed.

Please advise me of any decisions or actions taken in response to these recommendations within 45 days of the date of this letter. If you require further information, please contact Deputy Inspector General Jessica Silver at 212.635.3150.

Sincerely,



Letizia Tagliafierro
Inspector General

Cc: Derek Davis, Esq.
CUNY General Counsel and Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs

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